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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (10/26): More clashes between Palestinians and Israeli police at Al Aqsa Mosque

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Main Stories:  
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The dailies prominently report on yesterday's confrontations at Al Aqsa Mosque between Palestinians and the Israeli police. Reports note that the Israeli police and soldiers entered the mosque in the morning and closed all entrances to prevent Muslims from entering to pray, and cut the electricity so that the mosque could not issue the call to prayer. More than 20 Palestinians were injured and 20 people were arrested, including the former Palestinian Authority (PA) Minister of Jerusalem Affairs Hatem Abdel Qader. Among the injured were photographers and reporters of local news agencies. The PA Presidency spokesperson Nabil Abu Rudeina condemned the Israeli incursions and warned Israel of escalating the situation. According to the reports, the Israeli police left the mosque after Egypt and Jordan intervened.

Head of the Hamas Political Bureau Khaled Mishal's October 25 speech receives front page coverage in the three dailies. Mishal reiterated that Hamas is in favor of achieving national reconciliation and urged all parties to carefully study the Egyptian plan before blaming Hamas for not signing it. Additionally, Mishal condemned PA President Mahmoud Abbas's decision to hold presidential and legislative elections on January 24, 2010 describing the act as "illegal and illegitimate." He noted that this decision will only deepen the state of division.

Hamas newspaper Al-Resala reports that Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak announced that he will not form a special committee to investigate Israeli soldiers' behaviors during the recent conflict in Gaza.

Gaza-based Al-Quds radio reports that Egypt heavily criticized Hamas

for its position on national reconciliation and accused them of obstructing efforts. The report notes that the Arab League will convene to discuss the implications of Hamas's position.

Weekend Stories:

Sunday October 25:

All three dailies lead with comments by President Abbas on Saturday reiterating his insistence on achieving national unity, but noting that elections must be held on time "because the elections are a legal and constitutional obligation." Abbas added, "as we continue to fulfil our constitutional obligation, we will continue with reconciliation efforts, political work, and negotiations. We will move forward and take all matters very seriously."

Al Quds runs a front page story quoting unnamed senior Palestinian sources stating that Egyptian officials are angry with Hamas because of its refusal to sign the national reconciliation agreement. The sources added that Cairo is aware that the Hamas leadership is subject to pressure by other countries to obstruct the reconciliation efforts in order to negatively impact Egypt's role in the region. An Egyptian official announced that Cairo will not ignore comments made by the different factions on the Egyptian plan for national reconciliation, but will take them into consideration upon implementation of the agreement, once it is approved. The source revealed that contacts are taking place between Egypt and Hamas to clarify some of Hamas's concerns.

Al Quds and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida run front page stories on Israeli

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police forces increasing their presence around Al Aqsa Mosque. The Israel police said it will deploy large forces around Al Aqsa Mosque and in Jerusalem neighbourhoods following calls for Palestinians to protect the mosque against the Israeli occupation. The police said it will respond firmly to any attempt to disrupt public order. Meanwhile, Hatem Abdel Qader told Al Quds newspaper that extremist Jewish groups broadcasted called on their followers to enter Al Aqsa Mosque today and perform religious rituals. Abdel Qader added that the Israeli police should learn from the events that took place earlier this month and stressed that allowing extremists to enter will create an explosive situation for which Israel will be held responsible.

Saturday, October 24

All three dailies run front page stories on Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas issuing a decree on Friday calling for presidential and legislative elections on January 24, 2010. In an official statement, Fatah said this is a constitutional obligation, while Hamas rejected the decree and said that it constitutes a harsh blow to reconciliation efforts. Nabil Abu Rudeineh, the Spokesperson for the Office of the President, told Al Ayyam that President Abbas agreed to the reconciliation agreement proposed by Egypt which called for the elections on June 28, 2010, but Hamas did not accept the Egyptian proposal. Therefore, Abu Rudeineh added, "since Hamas did not accept the proposed agreement, President Abbas is complying with the legal procedures stipulated by the Basic Law and has thus signed the decree to conduct the elections on its constitutional date." One Hamas official threatened to conduct elections separately in Gaza on the same day.

The dailies also run front page stories on President Obama's phone call to President Abbas on Friday during which they discussed issues related to the peace process. President Obama reiterated his personal commitment to the establishment of a Palestinian state, while President Abbas reiterated his commitment to a peace process that has clear terms of reference that would lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Nabil Abu Rudeineh said that "the call was very important for the future of the peace process and for the region as a whole."

Al Quds carries front page news that the Municipality of Jerusalem will start implementing demolition orders for at least 59 buildings in East Jerusalem, including 42 houses. Ahmad Rwaidy, head of the

Jerusalem Unit at the Office of the Palestinian President, said that this is like a declaration of war on the Palestinian presence in occupied Jerusalem. Rwaidy warned that this step will add fuel to an already inflamed situation. Rwaidy also said that the Jerusalem municipality and Ministry of Interior have distributed demolition orders for 150 houses in Jerusalem over the past few days, particularly in the Silwan and Al-Bustan neighbourhoods. Rwaidy stressed that these measures are part of a policy of ethnic cleansing to force Palestinians out of Jerusalem.

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BLOCK QUOTES:

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1) Al-Quds independent daily runs an editorial under the title "Your Statements Will Not Rescue Al-Aqsa" (10/26): "It is shameful that the Palestinian Authority and its bodies do not have anything except condemnation for the Israeli attacks against Muslims and the holy sites. To all Arab leaders, your condemnation will not do us any good ... we need serious measures."

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2) Talal Okal opines in Al-Ayyam independent daily under the title "A Little Sense of Responsibility"(10/26): "The Palestinian President is obliged to issue the decree for holding the elections on time, he has no other choice ... If the president did not issue such a decree, Palestine will suffer from constitutional vacuum that no one will accept."

RUBINSTEIN